John Sakowitz Ruff Ruff Work in Progress- Not for Distribution

COMMUNITY TASK FORCE ADDRESSES PALMER PARK PROBLEM

Multi-pronged approach to reducing indecent behavior in park to be used.

Volunteer patrols starting soon.

Members of various communities, organizations and agencies have been meeting for several months seeking a solution to problems of improper and indecent behavior in Palmer Park. Made up of representatives from the El Paso County Health Department, Southern Colorado AIDS Project, the Colorado Springs Police Department, Planned Parenthood, Ground Zero, Parents, Families , and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, two local Bars, The Penthouse and the Hide & Seek and the Division of Parks and Recreation, the Task Force has been developing a plan of action to address issues and seek to ameliorate the behavior that leads people to this type of activity.

Direct intervention will follow months of educational outreach through posters and articles that have appeared in places likely to be seen by these people. The planned intervention will be in the form of patrols made up of volunteers from the various organizations who will walk problem areas of the park and attempt to educate offenders or potential offenders of the direct risks and dangers of this behavior as well as to the unsuitability of the behavior in public places.

Along with attempts at holding direct discussions with likely Palmer Park users, the patrols will hand out literature that explores the dangers inherent in this type of activity. Among those are: 1) the Danger of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, being spread through this medium. The Health Department has identified that 46 of those arrested, one third, were designated as HIV related. This fact and educational materials on safer sex practices will be distributed. 2) It is not uncommon in secluded areas where this type of activity occurs that there are a high degree of bashings. In Palmer Park already there was a murder that was so related and there have been other incidences reported to local anti-violence groups. Across the country, there have been hundreds of such actions reported from areas like this, including dozens of murders. 3) The public has a right to be concerned about this type of activity. It is both inappropriate to expose them to such behavior, it also takes away their rights to freely utilize a public recreational spot. They, and their children, have a right not to be subjected to seeing these activities or seeing the residues of them. Because of public concerns, Park Police have stepped up activities and close to two hundred people have been arrested for pubic indecent behavior. All but two have been convicted.

The Palmer Park Task Force is working in other areas to ameliorate this activity. Working with the police, the District Attorney's Office and local judges, programs are being developed where convicted offenders will have to perform community service at SCAP or by cleaning up the areas where offending materials have been left in the park; will be required to participate in group educational classes and/or will be required to submit to professional counseling. Stiffer sentences for those repeating this type of activity are also to be used. Offenders are already being informed that vehicles can be seized when used in the commission of these illegal activities.

The Task Force is particularly concerned with the potential that unwise and over aggressive actions such as the patrols will have the possible result of moving the problem from Palmer Park to some other area. When the city cracked down of video arcade activities, they did not eliminate a problem, they simply moved it and, in may ways, made it harder to address and control. It is hoped that through the use of non-judgmental and low keyed approaches to these people and through required counseling and community service, we will begin to address the root of the problem--not just the symptom..

Patrol members will have undergone training in this type of intervention and will begin working the the Park during the week of July 16th, 1996. They will appear at unannounced times, principally during prime activity periods, three or more times a week for several hours each occurrence.

While the press will be asked to stay out of the patrol areas, a press conference and photo op will be held by the main Palmer Park entrance sign off at 10:30 AM, Wednesday, July 17, 1996. This will be just prior to the first patrol activity on that day. It should be noted that the police have been asked to be nearby in the event of problems but to also stay clear of the patrol areas during the times they are present.

PRESS CONFERENCE: Wednesday, July 17th, 10:30 AM Palmer Park Entrace Sign just off .
Patrols to be present and commence ther4eafter

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